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ABSTRACT

A description is provided of the work of the Student Assessment Task Force, which was charged by the Washington State Student Services Commission Executive Board to "provide leadership to the state system on the topic of assessment." Following background information on the charge of the task force and a statement of its objectives and philosophy, the report addresses the following issues: (1) the purposes and outcomes of assessment; (2) the percentage of community college students entering the system with basic skills deficiencies (50%-70% for English, 46%-66% for reading, and 53%-85% for mathematics); (3) components of model assessment programs currently in existence in the Washington community colleges (e.g., integration of assessment, advising/orientation and registration, automated systems for scoring and data collection, trained test administrators, no fee or low fee for students, techniques aimed at anxiety reduction, and self-assessment of students' self-concept and motivation); (4) cooperative efforts made by faculty and student services staff members to improve assessment services; (5) research or follow-up analysis; (6) access to the data generated by assessment; (7) the educational and/or experiential preparation needed by a coordinator of assessment; (8) criteria for selecting assessment instruments; and (9) the funding issues raised by survey data. The report concludes with task force recommendations, a report summary, a list of survey respondents and contact people, and a bibliography. (LAL)

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# WASHINGTON STATE STUDENT SERVICES COMMISSION

## STUDENT ASSESSMENT TASK FORCE

## REPORT

May 16, 1985

JC 860 193

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Washington State Student Services Commission

Student Assessment Task Force

REPORT

May 15, 1985

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## Background

This Task Force was given its charge by the Washington State Student Services Commission Executive Board. The charge was to "provide leadership to the state system on the topic of assessment," realizing that the workshop on "Student Assessment" presented by the Association on November 1 and 2, 1984 could be a "springboard for evaluation and improvement of our programs."

The charge affirms certain needs: (1) the state system is in need of leadership on the topic of assessment; and (2) the community colleges of Washington are in need of guidelines and standards so that they can evaluate and improve their assessment services.

The fact that the charge comes from the Student Services Commission implies a sense of mission by that Commission and those it represents. The implications are that Student Services has a role and responsibility in the process of assessment. The membership on the Task Force affirms that Student Services professionals have a cooperative relationship with colleagues in Instruction, Developmental Education, and Minority Affairs.

## Philosophy Statement

The open door nature of the community college has led to a highly diverse student population characterized primarily as part-time, adult, and academically underprepared for college-level work. The great diversity in entering student skill levels indicates that appropriate assessment of students' skills and careful placement is needed if we are to increase the possibility of student success. The community college which allows or advises academically underprepared students to enter college-level classes is effectively closing the door to their success and blocking the road to achievement of their educational goals.

Academic difficulties and limited personal and social resources are cited as one of the chief reasons students drop out of college, and the impact of this factor as a cause of attrition is increasing. If a student enters college with weak academic skills and poor motivation, it is unlikely that he or she will persist in a community college program. Appropriately placing students in educational programs where success is possible is required if we are to help underprepared students succeed. However, placement is impossible if entry-level skills are not identified. "Serious preassessment of student entry-level skills when students come to campus" is the first step in designing learner-centered retention programs (Rouesche, 1981).

There have been a number of reports submitted to decision-makers in the Washington Community College system which emphasize our responsibility to maintain an open door, while also providing our diverse students with the skills they need in order to succeed in college. Recent examples include Platform for Excellence (April, 1983), "The Open Door and Student Assessment and Placement" (March, 1983)--a joint statement by the Instructional and Student Services Commissions,"Western States Learning, Assessment, Retention Proposal" (May, 1984) by Dorothy Bray of the Learning Assessment Retention Consortium, and "Report on the State of Adult Literacy in Washinton" (May, 1984), by the Council for Learning Assistance Services.

These reports document the need for developmental course offerings, and reiterate the importance of a comprehensive, campus-wide assessment and placement program for directing students to courses consistent with their skill level. Surveys of assessment practices repeatedly show that all community colleges in the state are providing assessment of basic skills in some form. The question is not "whether to" but "How much?" and "Which tests?" and "What follow-up research is appropriate?" and "How do we define the basic competencies needed for success in college?"

Members of this task force considered the following questions:

1. What should be the purposes and outcomes of assessment?
2. How many community college students enter the system with basic skills deficiencies?
3. What can we learn from model components of assessment programs currently in existence in the Washington community colleges?
4. What cooperative efforts have been made by faculty and student services staff members in order to improve assessment services?
5. What kinds of research or follow-up analysis is being done, and what is needed in order to assure accountability? Who should have access to the data generated by assessment?
6. What educational and/or experiential preparation is needed by a coordinator of assessment?
7. What criteria should be used in selecting assessment instruments?
8. What are the funding issues raised by survey data?

1. What should be the purposes and outcomes of assessment?

The purpose of assessment is to develop a "profile of student strengths and weaknesses and an accurate prediction of where the student needs to be placed in the academic sequence of courses in order to experience success"

(Baker and Painter, 1983). Proper academic placement necessarily requires assessment of basic academic skills. The purpose of such assessment is to determine the level of work that the student is ready to undertake. Ideally, such assessment would include information about reading, language, and math skills along with self-image, attitude towards learning, learning style, and career goals. Comprehensive entry-level student assessment will help to alleviate student failure and attrition.

Members of the task force agreed that the purposes of assessment should be as follows:

- Enhance student success in college by providing useful information about his/her academic, personal, and social skills level at entrance. By giving incoming students feedback about their basic academic skills (writing, reading, and math, and their personal/social resources, such as study skills, time management skills, motivation to learn), we assist them in making informed decisions about course selection. The purpose is not to "screen out" students, but to assure that those who need further skills education are identified and offered assistance.

- Encourage effective teaching by providing students who are better prepared for college-level coursework.

- Encourage student responsibility by assisting them to make decisions about course selection, based on a realistic assessment of their strengths and weaknesses, and respect for individual differences.

- Encourage accountability by gathering relevant data on the skill levels of incoming and outgoing students, by conducting follow-up research on the effectiveness of assessment programs, and by analyzing the educational services provided in order to assure that academic skills are achieved by students completing associate degrees.

- Contribute to an integrated system of orientation, advising, counselling, and registration that is efficient and effective for students with diverse backgrounds and life circumstances.

Some of the outcomes that we would expect from a good student assessment program are:

1. Students should have a positive experience in assessment and be aware of their own readiness level in relation to the academic skills required for success in the college classroom.

2. When students have identified deficient skills levels, they should be fully aware of the remediation process necessary for overcoming these handicaps.

3. Students intending to complete a degree, certificate, or series of courses at Washington Community Colleges should receive an assessment of whether their reading, writing, and math skills and personal/social resources are adequate for college-level learning.

4. Those students whose skills and/or resources are deficient, or who could benefit from counseling or coursework designed to improve learning and study skills, should be referred to appropriate services as early as possible, preferably before completing their first 15 credits of college work.

5. Students should feel a heightened sense of their own abilities to succeed, as well as have a clearer understanding of high performance expectations by the college. Assessment services should not contribute to a feeling of failure or inferiority.

6. Faculty, staff and students should have confidence that the tests which are used for classroom and/or placement purposes are valid and reliable, and that they are normed appropriately.

7. Assessment procedures should be managed by professionals with test administration and interpretation skills. Regular follow-up studies should be carried out to assure credibility. Testing should also be efficient, cost-effective, and convenient for students.

8. Results of the tests and interpretation of the scores should be given to students. Access to the results should be limited to appropriate faculty and staff. In order to avoid unintentional biasing, placement recommendations, rather than raw scores, are appropriate to share with the students' instructors.[1] Raw scores should always be accompanied with an interpretation.

9. While authority to manage assessment services should be assigned to a qualified person, there should be ongoing cooperation and communication between those who test and those who teach.

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[1]A number of studies have shown how teachers can unintentionally affect student performance. For example, Rosenthal and Jacobson conducted an experiment in which they led teachers to believe that certain students could be expected to show a marked improvement during the year. Actually these students were randomly selected. Intelligence tests administered after the experiment had been in progress for several months revealed that these students had indeed improved more than others, evidently because their teachers expected them to do so. Source: Rosenthal, R., and Jacobson, L., Pygmalion in the Classroom: Teacher Expectation and Pupils' Intellectual Development (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968).

2. How many students enter the community college system with basic skills deficiencies?

It has been difficult to determine the numbers of community college students with basic skills deficiencies. About 77% of community college students are over 20 years old, and 44% are over 29 years old. This age distribution implies that large numbers of students are entering community colleges without recent educational experiences by which to assess their own basic skill levels. In addition, if they are first-time college students, they are unfamiliar with basic skills competencies needed and expected to succeed in college-level courses.

A number of institutions have tabulated data based on placement test performance. Following are results from five community colleges who attempt to assess most new students and who utilize placement instruments most commonly used by Washington community colleges: Comparative Guidance and Placement Test (CGPT), ASSET and Community College Assessment Program (CCAP).

In November of 1979, North Seattle Community College administered the reading portion of the CGPT to all students in class at 9:00 a.m. Results showed that 60% of the students tested read at or above college-level. About 40% read below college-level, including 8.5% reading below the 9th grade level. Although evening students, who tend to be older working students, were not included in the test group, these data do provide insight into reading level skills for full-time academic and vocational students.

Placement test data on new students provides information on basic skill levels for students upon entry to selected community colleges. Fort Steilacoom offers the Comparative Guidance and Placement Test (CGPT) to new students at part of their orientation program. Students intending to enroll in Adult Basic Education, English-as-a-Second-Language, and High School Completion programs, some part-time students, and students with prior college experience are not tested. Of about 2000 students tested in 1983-84, 67% scored below college-levels in English, 46% fell below college-level reading, and 53% tested below intermediate algebra.

Clark College administers ASSET to new full-time students and degree seeking part-time students except those with Washington Pre-College Test (WCPT) information, students with prior college experience, part-time students who register by mail, and students who register late. Data collected over the past three years show one-half of students tested need pre-college level English courses, and two-thirds need pre-college mathematics.

Yakima Valley College uses both the Community College Assessment Program (CCAP) and Washington Pre-College Test (WPCT) for entering students. Out of 636 students taking CCAP in 1984-85, 65% scored below college levels in English, 66% fell below college-level reading, and 84% tested below intermediate algebra.

Tacoma Community College uses the Comparative Guidance and Placement Test (CGPT) and the Washington Pre-College Test (WPCT) as assessment instruments for placement purposes. Data collected on 2,539 students tested between Fall, 1983 and Fall, 1984 demonstrate that approximatley 58% of new students score below college-level reading and 65% score below college-level English. Only 5% to 15% of new students come to TCC with the math background to take intermediate algebra placement test and 75% to 85% of new students tested are referred to classes below Math 101 (Intermediate Algebra).

Placement test data from these assessment programs indicate significant numbers of students entering community colleges with basic skills below college levels. New students with pre-college abilities ranged from 50% to 70% for English, 46% to 66% for reading, and 53% to 85% for mathematics.

3. What can we learn from model components of assessment programs currently in existence in Washington Community College's?

Seventeen community colleges responded to an invitation to describe the best elements of their assessment services, and to indicate their top priorities for improving assessment, if they were given additional resources. Some common themes were expressed, and may be interpreted as suggested directions or standards.

A. Assessment Services at Entry

Model programs emphasized convenience to students, the integration of assessment, advising and/or orientation, and registration, and the advisability of early assessment (at or before admission during first week of class, etc.). Some examples:

- The Entry Center is a building used almost exclusively for processing entering and potential students. Formal testing, self-assessment, including study skills and assembling of all material concerning entry students is performed prior to advisement. (Lower Columbia)

- Entrance assessment is given during evenings to allow working entering students to not need to miss work. (Gray's Harbor)

- A pilot program combined assessment with a day-long orientation and advisement workshop. Most found the process reassuring but some were forced to take time off work. (North Seattle)

- Assessment of reading, writing, and math skills is included in New Student Orientation sessions. Placement recommendations are available at the end of the session, at which time students meet with advisors for one-to-one planning. (Whatcom)

- Assessment is performed during new student orientation. Following initial placement, the English and math instructors have in-class screening for determining competency levels. (Shoreline)

- The assessment program is offered not only on the main campus but also at most branches, bringing the program to where the students would be taking most of their classes. (Fort Steilacoom)

- Placement testing is done continuously any time of the year except August in English and math labs. (Big Bend)

- A rough draft of a writing sample is given the first day of English class, with a final version the second day. Scoring is completed the third day, with interpretation and adjustments of schedules on the fourth. (Spokane Falls)

- Administration of English and reading instruments is done by the admissions office near the time the student applies for admission. The system pleases English faculty as they have fewer changes during the first week of class. (Bellevue)

B. Scoring and Interpretation

Colleges using automated systems were pleased with the efficiency. The importance of trained test administrators, and consistency in scoring was also emphasized.

- Scoring is done by a full-page Scantron 5200 machine which places information automatically into the computer system. The computer is able to do statistical analysis. (Fort Steilacoom and Skagit Valley)

- Test scoring is done by a printing Scantron machine. Data is hand-entered into a Wang which prints out scores and recommended English level on a card given to the student. The data is then available in the Wang for further research. (Bellevue)

- All tests are scored by Scantron with results put in a computer for statistical analysis. (Lower Columbia)

- Scoring of each writing sample is independently performed by two English instructors using a 1-6 scale. If the two ratings are only one point apart, the average is used. Those with more than one point difference are read by a third instructor. Third readings are required in less than 10% of the cases. (Spokane Falls)

- A training program for peer counselors administering the CGPT ensures that the standardized testing procedures are followed and the test results are a truer picture of student's academic skill levels. (Tacoma)

C. Fees

Colleges indicated a desire to keep the cost of testing as low as possible. Although most colleges do not charge students for tests, some college's indicated alternatives to the use of state funding sources. For example:

- Profits from GED and WPCT are used to fund the testing program at no direct charge to entering students. (Peninsula)

- State funds are supplemented with ABE grants, Department of Corrections, Department of Social and Health Services and the Student Activities Fund, etc. Fort Steilacoom is able to operate the assessment program without charge to students.

- Because students pay for the WPCT, ACT, and SAT, all of which are acceptable for assessment purposes, it seems reasonable to charge $5 for the CCAP. This covers most costs including tests, administration, scoring and recordkeeping. (Skagit Valley)

D. Other Assessment Logistics

- Avoidance of unnecessary testing duplication is a goal. SCPT, SAT, and ACT or locally administered tests are all acceptable. ( Olympic, Skagit Valley)

- "Anxiety reducing" techniques are used to make students feel more comfortable about taking CGPT. The results of the testing are, therefore, more valid and the students feel better about the experience. (Tacoma)

- A self-assessment form is used to evaluate students' self-concept and motivation. This information is used in conjunction with test results to suggest appropriate class placement The value of this form could be strengthened if advisors paid more attention to student responses, however. (Tacoma)

- The English department assesses both beginning and ending language skill levels. These scores are used to prevent failure in composition classes, to assess progress in increasing

skills and to determine excellence. In preventing failure the assessment is used to suggest developmental coursework. In determining excellence the assessment is used in part to award credit. (Wenatchee Valley)

4. What cooperative efforts have been made by faculty and student services staff in order to improve assessment services?

A. Instrument Selection and Evaluation

A number of colleges reported communication efforts between various departments and Student Services professionals about the selection of placement instruments, suitability of the tests, and appropriateness of placement recommendation.

B. Use of Writing Sample

Writing samples were mentioned as bases for English placement at Big Bend, North Seattle, Peninsula, Spokane Falls, and Tacoma. These were usually administered and/or evaluated by English faculty. Reporting schools indicated that the work involved in using a writing sample was more than offset by the value received. For example, Roger Glaese at Big Bend Community College stated, "Inclusion of writing sample in English placement test is noteworthy in that the need for the evaluative information that an actual writing sample provides has outweighed the logistical and economic difficulties inherent in its implementation."

C. Flexibility of Movement After the Quarter has Begun

Columbia Basin and Shoreline reported satisfaction with procedures that enabled students to move up/down after the quarter had begun. Students were evaluated by faculty at the beginning of the quarter and those who were not correctly placed were given the option of moving to a higher or lower level of English or math.

D. Advising Practices

Several schools reported that personalized advising programs, which involved many faculty were the most impressive outcome of assessment efforts. Those schools include Olympic, Peninsula, Spokane Falls, and Yakima Valley. In addition, special advising programs exist at Fort Steilacoom and Peninsula for Developmental students, at North Seattle for ESL students, and at Walla Walla for athletes. Schools

which described advising programs all believed that caring and committed faculty were key to students' access. Spokane Falls and Yakima Valley provided training workshops for faculty so they could increase their advising skills.

E. Planning and Program Development

Several colleges emphasized the need for close coordination between student services and instruction staff members in order to create a harmonious and effective assessment program. A number of schools have created advisory committees composed of concerned faculty and administrative staff. At Yakima Valley, a committee instituted campus-wide testing and aimed to create a better system of assigning faculty advisors. At North Seattle, a Developmental Education Advisory Committee supports assessment efforts.

Spokane Falls reported that administrative encouragement and support was a key to their successful efforts thus far. During two years of extensive planning and research in order to implement a comprehensive basic skills assessment program, some exemplary themes emerged:

- Broad-based, participatory decision-making
- Excellent cooperation between instruction and student services
- Involvement of a large number of faculty/staff in the assessment/advising process
- A comprehensive, humane definition of assessment
- Assessment seen as a process rather than as a test
- The communication of an atmosphere of "success" and inclusion rather than exclusion when working with students
- Belief in student responsibility and choice
- Assessment as a catalyst for training faculty to do quality, consistent advising
- Research which supports proposals made and steps taken

F. Outcomes

Fort Steilacoom, North Seattle, Skagit Valley, and Yakima Valley reported increased awareness about need for greater emphasis on developmental education as a result of assessment efforts. North Seattle, in addition, as a result of their assessment program, has developed a Student Tracking Program, an early outreach program to students who are having academic difficulty. Skagit Valley's Special Services program is currently in its fourth year of operation. It is designed to increase the retention/graduation rate of high risk disadvantaged

students through early identification, comprehensive assessment and ongoing follow-up. Services provided include counseling/advising and tutorial and study skills assistance. Results from the first three years indicate a high degree of program success.

5. What kinds of research or follow-up analysis is being done and what is needed in order to assure accountability? Who should have access to data generated by assessment?

Assuring the accountability of assessment practices is a priority at several Washington community colleges, according to survey responses. Among those institutions conducting research or collecting data are Fort Steilacoom, North Seattle, Skagit Valley, Spokane Falls, Tacoma, Walla Walla, and Whatcom. The primary thrust of institutional research is follow-up on student progress in classes to evaluate the effectiveness or validity of the assessment instrument for class placement purposes. Colleges are establishing their own local norms and developing profiles of students' academic skill levels as measured by assessment instruments.

Of the colleges responding to the survey, North Seattle Community College appears to be the most involved in collecting, analyzing, and reporting data. In one study conducted Summer Quarter, 1983, orientation, assessment, and counseling services were provided to 128 liberal studies students. To determine the effectiveness of the student assessment services (SAS), a control group of 128 liberal studies students who were not provided with these services was included in the study. Effectiveness of the SAS was then measured by student perceptions of orientation and testing, credits earned versus credits attempted, second quarter enrollment, and GPA. A similar study was conducted in Fall, 1983. Other studies conducted at North Seattle Community College were designed to determine the correlation between test scores and grades, average reading scores of students entering classes without prerequisites, cut-off scores for placing students in classes requiring reading, and the correlation between student reading levels and text reading levels. North Seattle also compared placement decisions based on different placement tests by establishing correlations between the Stanford Reading Test scores and ASSET scores.

The studies conducted at North Seattle Community College yielded interesting results, some of which would probably be considered controversial.

Results comparing assessed students with non-assessed students include:

(1) Assessed students enrolled for more credits than non-assessed students in their first and second quarters of enrollment.

(2) Assessed students earned significantly more credits their first quarter of enrollment but not their second quarter of enrollment.

These data indicate that students who are not only tested but who also participate in a supportive counseling/advising session are more successful. They both enroll in more classes and complete more of them. This is consistent with what we would expect from a student focused assessment program.

In the study to determine correlation between test scores and grades, they found that reading contributes to final grades on some classes more than others. Out of 17 courses studied, there was a significant correlation between scores and final grades for only three classes. In other classes, reading ability accounted for little of the final grade. Further, students who dropped out of the class did not have significantly lower reading scores than those who completed the class. North Seattle also found that quarter-to-quarter retention and GPA did not vary significantly between assessed and non-assessed students. One conclusion drawn at North Seattle is that grading practices vary widely and are usually skewed toward higher grades. Therefore, grades may not be a good indicator of the usefulness of assesssment.

In developing a profile of student reading levels, North Seattle found that 70% of the students in a sample group read at or above the 12th grade level, 21% read between the 9th and 11th grade level, and 8% read at or below the 8th grade level. Most of their textbooks seem to be at the 12th grade reading level or above.

Finally, research results demonstrate that there is a high correlation between scores on the Stanford Reading Test and scores on the ASSET Test, indicating that placement decision based on either of these tests would be comparable.

Research conducted at the other community colleges mentioned above yielded generally positive results. For example, Tacoma Community College evaluated the effectiveness of their assessment instrument, and found that the CGPT

was an effective instrument for placing students in English classes and validated their cut-off scores for English class placement. However, they found little correlation between CGPT scores and success in math classes. Research conducted Fall, 1984 demonstrated that students who did not follow the English class recommendation based on CGPT scores, did not complete their English class successfully. Of the CGPT tested students who earned grades of D, E, I, and W in English classes Fall of 1984, 70% had enrolled in an English class higher than that which was recommended. Further, a cross tabulation of reading level with course grades of students enrolled in 100 and 200 level courses indicates that students with demonstrated college-level reading on the CGPT have a higher probability of succeeding (e.g., earning a C or better) than those who are below college-level reading.

Yakima Community College found that placement based on CCAP scores was accurate and that students placed appropriately tended to succeed. Whatcom Community College found that there were fewer adds and drops after they implemented a more integrated system of assessment and advising. Walla Walla Community College found that athletes who were placed in classes based on CGPT test scores had a 91% pass rate in reading, English, and math courses. This research demonstrated the accuracy of their local test norms and course equivalency scores which were developed in 1982-83 for advising and placement purposes. Finally, Spokane Falls Community College found that knowledge of CCAP scores enhanced the probability of predicting class success. A pilot study showed that assessed students had a higher percentage of credits, and had a slightly higher GPA than the non-assessed group. However, they also found that there were many individual exceptions to the correlation between test scores and grades. Even those students who do poorly on the CCAP have a 50/50 chance of succeeding in the class.

The assessment data gathered and analyzed is used in a variety of ways. As the primary use of assessment scores is to recommend appropriate course placement to students, it follows that research results are used to validate cut-off scores, modify placement guidelines, and revise the advising/placement process. Research results can and are used in other ways, including long-range institutional planning and curriculum revision. Furthermore, North Seattle Community College indicated that research results suggest a need to examine grading practices, differentiate between classes which require good reading skills and those which are less reading dependent, and develop class

placement criteria which include not just reading level but other communication skills as well. Finally, Spokane Falls Community College research reminds us that test scores alone are not sufficient predictors of academic success. Students' past academic record, attitude, self-concept, motivation, and study skills must also be taken into consideration.

Though much is being done to assure the accountability of assessment services in our community college system, much still remains undone. Community colleges responding to the survey report a need for more and better research. Comprehensive data gathering, analysis, and reporting will require additional staff time from those with a research background, computer hardware and software, and a tie-in between computerized assessment information and the student data base information available through the Consortium.

In order to insure accountability, it is important for an accurate record-keeping system to be in place. Access to the data should be limited to appropriate faculty and staff members. Studies of student test scores compared with final grades should be used to improve the assessment services, and not as an informal way to evaluate teaching faculty. Standardized tests should not be used as a measure of student performance in class, unless course content can be shown to be directly related to test questions.

6. What educational and/or experiential preparation is needed by a coordinator of assessment?

The task force recommends that anyone charged with coordinating or directing an assessment program should have not only an ability to work with faculty and a sensitivity to students' concerns, but also an adequate professional background, including:

Education

- Tests and measurements/vocational assessment
- Professional testing issues and ethics
- Diagnosis and assessment/appraisal methods
- Statistics
- Research methods
- Philosophy of education
- Psychology of learning
- Counseling theories/fundamentals of counseling/career choice
- Interpersonal relations
- Career and/or information services
- Multicultural education and/or multicultural counseling

Experiential

Should have awareness/experience in:

- Needs of special community college populations
- Institutional priorities
- Student retention
- Global view of entire institution

7. What criteria should be used in selecting assessment instruments?

The Task Force recommends that the following criteria be used when selecting assessment instruments:

- Validity (believability or "trustability" that the test actually measures what we think it does)

- Reliability (the same results are achieved when the testing is repeated on large numbers of people)

- Ease of administration, scoring, and interpreting

- Reasonable cost

- Unbiased in terms of sex, race, age, ethnic background and handicap

- Supportive of students' feelings of success (e.g., doesn't create undue test anxiety, emphasizes feedback rather than success or failure, has relevance to students' experience)

- Produced by experts who offer support services and information, such as assistance with statistical analyses, refinement of local norms, follow-up research with large samples of participants, etc.

- Normed on community college students

When testing ethnic minorities, cultural bias in testing is a key issue. Since the major testing companies have made minimum progress in this area, and since most colleges have given little consideration to this area, those persons responsible for establishing cut-off scores must understand this phenomenon. Norms which include ethnic minority community college students in the pool should be used. If this does not exist for the instruments used, special adjustments in the scores should be made after careful research has occurred.

Faculty members sometimes express preferences for tests based on their own judgment or perceptions of how the test looks. This assumption that a test appears to be valid is called "face validity" and is not used by experts in educational measurement. Standards of measuring validity and reliability

have been established by testing experts in order to avoid the use of "face validity." Furthermore, it is not appropriate for faculty members to alter a standardized test to fit their own notions of appropriateness. This virtually eliminates any standard of reliability and validity established by standardization practices.

8. What are the funding issues raised by survey data?

The State Board for Community College Education submitted a high priority program improvement budget request to the governor's office for additional dollars to strengthen community college student assessment/placement testing programs in the 1985-87 biennium. Due to interest in basic skills instruction and the role of assessment in evaluating skill needs, information regarding current level services and program needs was collected by Jan Yoshiwara in the Fall of 1984. Based on that survey a number of funding issues emerged.

A. Program Staffing

Out of twenty-one colleges responding, only three had one or more full-time staff operating the program. The remaining 18 colleges used part-time help or assigned portions from several persons' full-time duties to the student assessment program. The need for additional staff was the most frequently mentioned need cited by survey respondents.

Positions deemed necessary varied according to the unique needs of each institution. Job functions needed included:

- Psychometry to evaluate appropriateness of placement test instruments, correlate test scores to specific course levels, and conduct longitudinal studies on success rates for students tested.

- Counseling to provide follow-up academic advising and learning skills assessment, particularly for students testing at low basic skill levels.

- Coordination to manage the program, administer, and score tests.

- Clerical support to enter test scores in student files.

B. Automation

Automated Scoring Systems have a number of benefits. Most programs score tests manually. When appropriate, automated scoring should be made available in order to provide immediate feedback to students,

as well as to accommodate the increased volume of students who are tested. Automation will improve integration of test scores with other student information (grade transcripts, program of study, previous academic records). Easy access to comprehensive academic records for students, advisors, and counselors will facilitate informed educational planning, and follow-up counseling.

Limited validity studies and longitudinal research were also conducted manually by a few colleges. A number of respondents indicated needs to validate the appropriateness of cut-off test scores for course placements by tracking actual student performance in recommended coursework.

Integration of automated scoring with campus computer systems will allow rapid scoring and accurate placement recommendations to be provided to students, as well as the establishment of a data base.

C. Test Materials

Limited funds for test materials have caused several institutional adjustments. At most community colleges, cost was a major consideration during selection of test instruments. Although survey respondents reported using a variety of basic skills test instruments, the Comparative Guidance and Placement Test (CGPT) was cited as most commonly used. The reasons given were: ease of administration, reasonably dependable assessment validity, and low cost. However, several administrators noted a preference for test instruments with accessory computer software for automated scoring, tabulation, and research. Some were not able to utilize preferred test instruments due to cost.

Six institutions used their own locally developed placement tests for mathematics, partially due to cost considerations. However, these local tests were not scientifically normed or validated for accuracy. Many institutions limited the number of students tested, due to lack of funds for test instruments and limited staff for scoring. Five institutions did not provide comprehensive testing in all three basic skills, but limited testing to students entering college-level English Composition. Three institutions indicated that a student testing fee subsidized the cost of materials.

D. Facilities

Three survey respondents reported facility needs for a centralized testing center and for access to large rooms for group testing.

E. Basic Skills Courses

Community colleges with comprehensive student assessment programs have found that one-half to two-thirds of the students tested scored below college-level in reading, mathematics, and English abilities. Development of comprehensive assessment programs must be accompanied by adequate availability of pre-college basic skills courses to accommodate demonstrated needs of those students.

F. Assessment Services for Special Needs

Only three colleges responding to the task force's survey mentioned any special support services for minority, ESL, or handicapped students. For example, Peninsula Community College has an Office of Multicultural Services, which administers the CGPT to minority students, and gives the Michigan Test to students who do not have English as their first language. North Seattle Community College uses the Comprehensive English Language Test (CELT) plus a writing sample for initial placement into ESL classes, and provides continuous evaluation of students' work by instructors. Toward the end of the quarter, ESL and developmental instructors together review students' progress (including oral and written work) and make carefully planned placement decisions.

Shoreline Community College provides additional assessment if necessary for handicapped students. They have an extensive program, funded by Title XIX Funds and King County to assist students with cerebral palsy, with three and one-half staff members to provide direct service, including assessment.

Without additional resources, community colleges will be very limited in their abilities to respond to the special needs of these students.

Results of this and previous surveys show that community college student assessment programs have increased in number and scope over the past five years. With recent budget reductions and a lack of additional program dollars to fund student assessment, colleges have been compelled to shift existing funds and apportion assessment program duties to

existing staff. Several institutions chose to impose an additional testing fee upon students to fund the program.

In spite of budget limitations, institutions have implemented student assessment programs because of high priority given to quality educational planning and improved student academic success. However, it is clear that additional funding must be identified both for student assessment and for basic skills intruction to meet the needs of large numbers of community college students who can benefit from this effort.

## Task Force Recommendations

The Task Force recommends that:

(1) Copies of this report be disseminated to community college presidents, administrators within instruction and student services, counseling staff members, testing coordinators, developmental education faculty, State Board staff, and other interested parties.

(2) A conference be organized during the 1985-86 academic year, which would feature presentations by Washington community colleges with model assessment programs, and provide forums for sharing information about the logistics of effective assessment programs.

(3) A consortium of those interested in improving assessment services and sharing data within the state system should be developed, in order to maximize use of the resource people in our geographic area.

(4) A consulting team should be formed in order to provide ongoing training and consultation for colleges in the system.

(5) Colleges should develop communication and computation skills requirements needed by students to enhance successful class completion. These requirements should be communicated to students and advisors. Without this essential step, the broader purposes of assessment will not be realized.

(6) In order to assure program accountability and usefulness, ongoing research and follow-up studies are critical. Improvements and modifications should be based on results of these evaluation studies.

SUMMARY

Student Assessment Task Force Report

Purposes and Outcomes of Assessment

Proper academic placement necessarily requires assessment of basic academic skills and personal and social resources. The purpose of such assessment is to determine the level of work that the student is ready to undertake. Ideally such assessment would include information about reading, language, and math skills along with self-image, attitude towards learning, learning style, and career goals. The purposes of assessment should be to:

- support student success
- support effective teaching
- encourage student responsibility
- encourage accountability
- contribute to an integrated system of orientation, advising, counseling, and registration

The outcomes of assessment identified by the task force emphasized:

- that students should have a positive experience in assessment and be aware of their own readiness level in relation to the academic skills

- the necessity of making students who have identified deficient skill levels fully aware of the remediation process needed

- the need for all students intending to complete a degree, certificate, or series of courses at Washington Community Colleges to be able to receive an assessment of whether their reading, writing, and math skills and personal/social resources are adequate for college-level learning

- the importance of referring students whose skills and/or resources are deficient, or who could benefit from counseling or coursework designed to improve learning and study skills as early as possible, preferably before completing their first 15 credits of college work

- that students should feel a heightened sense of their own abilities to succeed, as well as a clearer understanding of high performance expectations by the college

- that assessment instruments are valid, reliable, normed appropriately, cost-effective, and convenient for students

- that assessment procedures are managed by professionals qualified in test administration and interpretation skills, and that regular follow-up studies are carried out to assure credibility

- that results of the tests and an interpretation of the scores be given to students, and that access to results should be limited to appropriate faculty and staff

- that there is ongoing cooperation and communication between those who test and those who teach

Students Entering the Community College System with Basic Skills Deficiencies

Based on data from five colleges, new students with pre-college abilities ranged from 50% to 70% for English, 46% to 66% for reading, and 53% to 85% for mathematics.

Model Assessment Program Components (based on survey data, March 1985)

The following are described in the report:

- integration of assessment, advising and/or orientation, and registration
- automated systems for scoring and data collection
- trained test administrators
- no fee or a low fee to students
- techniques aimed at reducing anxiety for students
- avoidance of unnecessary testing duplication
- self-assessment of students' self-concept and motivation
- cooperative efforts between faculty and student services staff in selecting and evaluating instruments, using writing samples, providing flexibility of movement for students after the quarter has begun, improved advising practices, planning and program development, increased awareness of the need for developmental education.

Research and Data-Collection

The primary thrust of institutional research is follow-up on student progress in classes to evaluate the effectiveness or validity of the assessment instrument for class placement purposes. Colleges are also establishing their own local norms and developing profiles of students' academic skill levels.

Preparation Needed by an Assessment Program Coordinator

The task force recommends a number of educational and experiential qualifications for anyone coordinating assessment services, including background in tests and measurements, vocational assessment, testing issues and ethics, appraisal methods, statistics, research methods, and other abilities.

Criteria for Selecting Assessment Instruments

Rather than recommend any specific tests, the task force recommends that the following criteria be used in selection of instruments:

- validity and reliability
- ease of administration, scoring, and interpreting
- reasonable cost
- unbiased in terms of sex, race, age, ethnic background and handicap
- supportive of students' feelings of success
- produced by experts who offer support services and information
- normed on community college students

## Funding Issues

The following kinds of resource needs were identified by community colleges:

- program staffing
- automated scoring and data-collection capability
- test materials
- facilities
- increased basic skills courses
- assessment services for students with special needs (e.g., minority, ESL, handicapped, etc.)

## Recommendations

(1) Copies of this report be disseminated to community college presidents, administrators within instruction and students services, counseling staff members, testing coordinators, developmental education faculty, State Board staff, and other interested parties.

(2) A conference be organized during the 1985-86 academic year, which would feature presentations by Washington community colleges with model assessment programs, and provide forums for sharing information about the logistics of effective assessment programs.

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(4) A consulting team should be formed in order to provide ongoing training and consultation for colleges in the system.

(5) Colleges should develop communication and computation skills requirements needed by students to enhance successful class completion. These requirements should be communicated to students and advisors. Without this essential step, the broader purposes of assessment will not be realized.

(6) In order to assure program accountability and usefulness, ongoing research and follow-up studies are critical. Improvements and modifications should be based on results of these evaluation studies.

SURVEY OF MODEL ASSESSMENT SERVICES AT WASHINGTON COMMUNITY COLLEGES - SURVEY

| Colleges who have responded. | Contact Persons Assessment | Contact Persons Developmental Ed. |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Bellevue Community College | Don Noble<br>James Bennett | James Bennett |
| 2. Big Bend Community College | Roger Glaese | Jeff Wagnitz |
| 3. Centralia College | Dr. Mo Malik | Nancy Warnstadt |
| 4. Clark College | Dr. Annette Lambson | Clytis Buchan |
| 5. Columbia Basin Community College | Richard Humphries | Dr. J. Dale Geir |
| 6. Edmonds Community College | Darrell Hull | Greg Golden |
| 7. Everett Community College | Mira D. Sinco | Ted Keaton |
| 8. Fort Steilacoom Community College | Kenneth C. Hildebrant | |
| 9. Grays Harbor College | Eugene D. Schermer | Dr. Pete Stafford |
| 10. Green River Community College | Harold Taylor | Robert Lawrence |
| 11. Highline Community College | Michael J. Grubiak | Pam Arsenault |
| 12. Lower Columbia College | Norman Lederer | Norman Lederer |
| 13. North Seattle Community College | Dr. Ruth Ullman Paige | Dr. Marie Rosenwasser |
| 14. Olympia Tech. Community College | Michael Beehler | ulie Cushman – |
| 15. Olympic College | Richard E. McConaughy | Dr. William Simpson |
| 16. Peninsula College | Wendy Shea | Patsy Callaghan |
| 17. Seattle Central Community College | Ron Hamberg | Laurie Cohen |
| 18. Shoreline Community College | William L. Demetre | David Wright |
| 19. Skagit Valley College | Kim Requa | Gerald Jordheim |
| 20. South Seattle Community College | Robert L. Beardemphl | Dr. Gale Tower |
| 21. Spokane Community College | Bill McMulkin | M. Lynn West |
| 22. Spokane Falls Community College | Jackie Hanke | Jan Swinton |
| 23. Tacoma Community College | Priscilla Bell | Richard Spangler |
| 24. Walla Walla Community College | Dick Cook<br>Dr. Myles J. Anderson | Hilda Thompson |
| 25. Wenatchee Valley College | Ed Chenevert<br>Nancy Howard | Dick Peterson |
| 26. Whatcom Community College | Rick Stewart | Sis McManus |
| 27. Yakima Valley College | Eleanor Hefferman | Mary Lou Schmidt |

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